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Summary of the ministerial dialogue on illegal trade in wildlife

1. The ministerial dialogue on illegal trade in wildlife was convened from 7–10.30 p.m. on 26 June 2014. During the dialogue, delegates from xxx countries, including xxx ministers and deputy ministers and xxx representatives of major groups and stakeholders, exchanged views, *inter alia*, on ways to address gaps and make progress in preventing the illegal trade in wildlife, on the role of the United Nations system and on effective measures to ensure an integrated response by the United Nations and other stakeholders to the illegal trade in wildlife.

2. The discussions were supported by an information note by the Executive Director (UNEP/EA.1/INF/19). The document provides the latest evidence on the scope and scale of the illegal trade in wildlife, including timber. The note outlines the global nature and scope of the challenge of the illegal trade in wildlife and its environmental, social and economic consequences. It also highlights the evidence that links the illegal trade in wildlife to threat finance and organized crime, providing a significant contribution to better-informed policy responses. Although the issue has been highlighted at a number of high-level sessions and conferences, on-the-ground implementation has failed to develop. A concept note containing guiding questions for the ministers and other participants was also made available.

3. During the discussion, ministers and other delegates provided their views on the challenges of illegal wildlife trade and its consequences for the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable development, which they observed were exacerbating the impact of other global crises. It is estimated that resources worth between $48 billion and $153 billion are lost through illegal trade of wildlife, including timber and fisheries, globally each year.

4. Governments and the international community have recently directed substantial attention to addressing threats posed by the increased involvement of transnational organized criminal networks in the illegal trade of wildlife, and ministers said that those challenges could only be effectively tackled through the unified efforts of the international community to support national efforts.

5. The discussions were guided by a concept note made available to delegates, which considered three broad areas of discussion that were taken up during the ministerial dialogue: national and international action; coherent and coordinated response from the United Nations system; and maintaining momentum – the road from the first session of the Environment Assembly.

6. In relation to national and international action, delegates highlighted the following issues during the dialogue:

(a) There is a need to establish appropriate and strengthened legal frameworks and incentives that will facilitate the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and other international commitments. Such efforts will benefit from strong leadership by Governments in

developing coordinated domestic strategies;

(b) Due to the multi-dimensional nature of the illegal wildlife trade, including links to peace, security, development and the fight against international organized crime, it can only be effectively tackled through the unified efforts of the international community, national Governments, police, law enforcement agencies and civil society;

(c) There is a need to address gaps in knowledge in relation to the impacts of illegal wildlife trade and on its links to other forms of crime, on monitoring systems and research and the effectiveness of responses. Many delegations suggested that reviews of legislation should be continual and that further analysis was required to give broad understanding of the dynamics behind demand. It was also recognized that the private sector could play a critical role in intelligence information gathering, such as the role of the banking system in tracking financial flows;

(d) A number of examples of South-South and North-South cooperation were provided during the dialogue, highlighting the importance of building the human and institutional capacity of developing countries to strengthen environmental legislation, compliance and awareness and to fill the knowledge gaps on environmental jurisprudence;

(e) It was recognized that support from the international and bilateral donor community would be essential to facilitate national efforts and to encourage information sharing, forensic cooperation and zero tolerance on corruption and money-laundering practices;

(f) Many delegations stressed that consumer demand remained the most important driver of the illegal trade in wildlife, although they also recognized that poverty and corruption were also important drivers. It was recognized that considerable efforts were required to reach out in source, transit and consumer States to raise awareness of the scope and consequences of illegal trade in wildlife. It was suggested that civil society and the private sector could take an active part in developing and providing targeted information to raise public awareness and to educate the next generation on the adverse impacts of illegal wildlife trade;

(g) The need to engage with local communities and develop alternative livelihoods was stressed by many delegations, and it was said that in many instances such efforts would require significant additional investment and further incentives if they were to be effectively scaled up;

(h) The need for domestic, bilateral and regional coordination to tackle illegal timber trade was stressed by many speakers, as well as the need for coherence in legislation and the treatment of wildlife offenses as serious crimes. In that regard, resolution 23/1, adopted in May 2014 by the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, on strengthening a targeted crime prevention and criminal justice response to combat illicit trafficking in forest products, including timber, was welcomed.

7. In relation to a coherent and coordinated response from the United Nations system, delegates highlighted the following issues:

(a) Many speakers said that, as a facet of strengthening the United Nations system's support for national Governments, there was a need to recognize the transboundary and global nature of the challenges and impacts of the illegal wildlife trade and to foster cross-border cooperation between source, transit and destination countries, including through additional support to wildlife law enforcement networks;

(b) Many speakers said that there was a need to strengthen the United Nations system-wide response, including through strengthening existing cooperation mechanisms such as the Environment Management Group and the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, as well as through individual programmes of the United Nations, to improve collaboration among agencies, avoid duplication and support holistic national approaches to tackling the challenges of illegal wildlife trade;

(c) It was stressed that the United Nations system should provide additional support for national efforts to implement existing international commitments, including those under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to assist Member States in further identifying, developing and implementing the most appropriate responses to the illegal trade in wildlife;

(d) It was recognized that capacity-building and other support could be provided by the United Nations system, including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), to equip countries with tools to ensure improved environmental compliance and law enforcement and to promote support in the development and implementation of the environmental rule of law.

(e) There was wide recognition of the importance of promoting synergies and avoiding duplication among the members of the United Nations system and with other partners, and in that regard there was encouragement for strong collaboration between UNEP , the United Nations Development Programme and the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime in, among other areas, supporting capacity-building, awareness-raising among members of the judiciary, the public and law enforcement officers and systematic information sharing.

8. In relation to maintaining momentum – the road from the first session of the Environment Assembly, delegates highlighted the following issues:

(a) Many speakers welcomed the recognition of the importance of maintaining political momentum on the issue of illegal wildlife trade, including through the recent convening of high-level conferences such as those in Gaborone and Paris in December 2013 and London in February 2014 and the announced African Union summit to be convened in Brazzaville in October 2014, the consideration of the issue at the meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals in Quito in November 2014 and the World Parks Congress in Australia in November 2014, and the announcement by Botswana of a follow-up conference to the Gabarone and London events, to be held in March 2015. The meaningful actions that followed such conferences, such as the establishment of the UK Challenge Fund, the launch of the biodiversity for life initiative of the European Union and other commitments, were also enthusiastically welcomed;

(b) There was broad support for a strong resolution by the Environment Assembly addressing illegal trade in wildlife, as a sign of joint commitment to maintaining international momentum, and for having the topic on the agenda on the next session of the Environment Assembly;

(c) Many delegations said that there was a need to ensure the implementation of commitments already made and to ensure that progress was made on the front lines to address illegal trade in wildlife, but it was also said that the opportunity should be seized to address illegal wildlife trade at the General Assembly, through a resolution being developed by the Group of Friends in New York. Some delegations suggested that a United Nations special envoy might be helpful to enhance mobilization across the United Nations system;

(d) There was also widespread support for ensuring that the issue of illegal wildlife trade was taken forward as a part of the post-2015 development agenda.